

Moderating drinking is everyone’s responsibility

By Chaplain (Maj.) Thomas Azar  
8th Fighter Wing Chaplain

Do you think Johnnie can make you a good Walker, or Bud will make you wiser, or 20/20 will improve your vision. Only the silver bullet lives up to its name — it will strike you and other innocent people.

Summer, for many military members and their families, is a season for swimming, hiking and squadron social gatherings.

For some individuals, the increase in social activities brings with it an increase in drinking. Our health and mission require moderation in all we do, but especially in the consumption of alcohol. At present, moderation continues to be the best policy for the Department of Defense.

In a story entitled, *Plugging the Keg: students benefit when colleges limit excessive drinking*, (US News and World Report, Jan 1998) surveys found that since 1984, more than 44 percent of college students binge drink — a percentage that remained unchanged until recently. University leadership worked to counter several problems. They found students spend more than \$300 more per semester on alcohol than books, and drinking affected students’ grades. Students who drank excessively were more likely to engage in unprotected sex, get injured, damage property, or even die. As universities required more alcohol education and alcohol free fraternities, students began to focus more on their studies and other important activities.

Likewise, our military subculture can benefit from university studies and hence bring about positive changes made on behalf of preserving the health and life of all who take the oath. Our dedicated active duty members and their dependents make tremendous sacrifices on behalf of their high calling to serve their nation throughout the world. Since there’s little time to enjoy the people, places and panoramas, it becomes vital to provide education to make the best choices in the down time one is afforded. Some need to recreate their recreation time.

Let me share a true story of a couple that moved beyond moderation. Overindulgence has its price. While attending a squadron party, Peter and Patsy started drinking from the start of the social hour well past the dinner and

formal program.

The commander and first sergeant made several pitches about safety. They highlighted designated drivers, dial-a-ride and the blue goose transportation. Unfortunately this couple failed to heed the advice. As the couple became more inebriated, physically exhausted and mentally incapacitated, one could read the writing on the wall. Neither was capable of driving. They departed the club after midnight and drove into the night. The rain required slower speeds, and special care on the turns. Unfortunately they lost control at a curve in the road. They skidded and the impact of the vehicle against the curb caused the car to roll over and crash into a brick wall in front of a house.

The humid temperatures, wet roads, and distance from the base delayed their rescue. They lay mangled in the car for more than 30 minutes before rescue workers arrived and attempted to free them.

As a chaplain, I get to see the unfortunate end results when these deadly elements combine. Individuals who fail to heed the warnings of the military produce casualties. Real losses tear at the fabric of families and squadrons for decades. The most difficult part of my work is being part of the casualty notification team that informs next of kin, friends and squadron members that another human being that they know and love was killed. The shock, depression and grief tear at the soul of the survivors.

A summer event that aimed at creating a festive evening ends with trauma, grief and a funeral. Another life is recklessly stolen from under our protected skies. I’ve seen it many times and I have pondered the causes and effects.

Then I remembered the words of my grandfather: “To think that a man would put a thief into his mouth to steal away his brain.” No one likes a thief when he roams around your house. I was a police chaplain for 10 years before I entered active duty. I would answer calls on a daily basis from individuals whose homes, cars or personal property was stolen from them. It was always a heart-wrenching experience.

A few years ago, our house on base was robbed. My family felt defiled, outraged and angry toward this person who broke the lock and proceeded to steal items of irreplaceable value — my wife’s engagement and wedding rings,

anniversary pendants and my son’s coin collection and daughter’s piggy bank with her Disneyland money.

How much greater is the value of a person. My grandfather’s words took on new meaning. Imagine some little person entering your mind and stealing your perception, concentration and vision. Imagine this thief disengaging your decision-making processes to the point you harm property, people and even your own family members. No one likes a thief in their home, yet many allow one to enter his or her mind.

Why do we allow this liquid thief to freely enter our mental house for several hours, and go through the hemispheres of our brain and destroy cells that cannot be regenerated? There’s no insurance coverage on this loss.

A decade ago, the DOD realized the effects of first- and second-hand smoke. Policy changes improved the quality of the workplace and social life. In like manner, changes are being made concerning sexual harassment, human dignity and sensitivity to religious and racial groups.

Many senior NCOs and commanders realize the correlation and direct impact the working climate has on the person, unit morale, safety and productivity. Maybe it’s time to resolve the issue of first- and second-hand drinking.

Military guidelines underscore zero tolerance toward immoral, illegal and

unacceptable words and behavior. It would be wise at a minimum to provide better education and possible restrictions when it comes to alcohol, too. Security forces will testify a vast majority of domestic violence, sexual abuse and family advocacy cases involve alcohol. At this base alone, 100 percent of the sexual assault cases involve alcohol. Alcohol robs a person of his or her faculties, which in turn directly impact family and squadron life, as well as our ability to be a fit, war-fighting unit.

Sadly, it will take the loss of a noted person to start the wheels of moderation and enforce stricter rules about drinking, just as there are rules for drugs, smoking, and fraternization. Rules outline our safety parameters and seek to provide greater freedom. They protect the innocent and manage the drinker.

Chaplains and other helping professionals are available for those seeking to look at the causes and issues leading individuals to alcohol abuse and/or dependence.

They are available to identify and address the emotional and internal factors having a negative influence on the person anesthetizing him or herself through alcohol consumption.

Leaders at every level need to take a direct interest and concern in the use of alcohol.

We owe it to our people, their families and our country.

Commander’s Hotline

The commander’s hotline is your direct line of communication between me and the Wolf Pack. It’s one of several means of helping to resolve concerns and to get my response to comments and questions. As a general rule, I ask you to contact the agency involved first, but if you are not satisfied, call the hotline at 782-5284, e-mail the 8th Fighter Wing Public Affairs office or e-mail me directly.



Col. Burt Field  
8th Fighter Wing commander

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Base exchange.....	782-4520
Chapel.....	782-4300
Civil engineer squadron customer service.....	782-5318
Commissary manager.....	782-4144
Computer help desk.....	782-2666
Fitness center.....	782-4026
Housing office.....	782-4088
Inspector General.....	782-4850
IDEA office.....	782-4020
Law enforcement desk.....	782-4944
Legal assistance.....	782-4283
Military equal opportunity.....	782-4055
Military pay.....	782-5574
Military personnel flight customer service.....	782-5276
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